

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRASILIA 7803

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BR

SUBJECT: DISTENSION HALTED, BUT POLITICS GOES ON

REF: A. BRASILIA 6683 B. BRASILIA 6516

SUMMARY: GEISEL'S HALTING OF (BUT NOT REVERSAL OF) DISTENSION APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED AND ASSIMILATED STOICALLY AND THERE IS VIRTUALLY NO ALTERATION ON THE POLITICAL SURFACE. BOTH PARTIES ARE STRUGGLING TO OVERCOME INTERNAL DIFFERENCES IN PREPARING FOR THEIR NATIONAL CONVENTIONS, AND THE CENTRAL POLITICAL CONCERN HAS REMAINED THE GOVERNMENT ARENA PARTY'S DIM ELECTORAL PROSPECTS AND THE GRAVE QUESTION MARK THEY PLACE OVER BRAZIL'S POLITICAL FUTURE. TOPICS SURROUNDING THAT CONCERN-- POSSIBLE PARTY REFORMULATION OR PROLIFERATION, POSSIBLE CHANGES IN THE SCHEDULING OF, OR RULES GOVERNING, FUTURE ELECTIONS--ARE, AS BEFORE THE GEISEL SPEECH, THE DAILY BREAD OF POLITICS AT THE MOMENT, AND
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THE PREVIOUS CONSENSUS-- THAT NO FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES ARE TO BE

EXPECTED BEFORE THE 1976 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, - CONTINUES TO PREVAIL. THE WIDESPREAD ASSUMPTION IS THAT IF THE RESULTS OF THOSE ELECTIONS APPEAR TO SPELL TROUBLE FOR ARENA-- THAT IS, FOR THE GOVERNMENT-- IN THE 1978 CONGRESSIONAL AND GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS, THEN STEPS WILL BE TAKEN-- PARTY REFORMULATION, CHANGES IN ELECTORAL LAWS, OR WHATEVER--TO ENSURE THAT NO SUCH TROUBLE DEVELOPS. END SUMMARY.

1. JUST OVER ONE MONTH SINCE PRESIDENT GEISEL EFFECTIVELY CALLED A HALT TO FURTHER POLITICAL DISTENSION, AT LEAST FOR AN INDEFINITE PERIOD, THE POLITICAL SCENE HERE REVEALS LITTLE ALTERATION IN DAY-TO-DAY BEHAVIOR. TO BE SURE, HIS SPEECH DID NOT GO DOWN UNPROTESTED (REFS A AND B); BUT HIS MESSAGE APPEARS ESSENTIALLY TO HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED AND ASSIMILATED, WITH THE STOICISM THAT THE LACK OF CHOICE REQUIRED.

2. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN A HALT, PERHAPS TEMPORARY, TO DISTENSION AND ITS REVERSAL SEEMS TO US IMPORTANT IN THIS REGARD: THAT IS, WE STILL CONSIDER THAT THE UNDOING OF THE ADVANCES MADE UNDER DISTENSION, FORCED RETURN TO THE DAYS OF A STERILE PRESS AND A MUZZLED AND IMPOTENT CONGRESS, WOULD RUN THE RISK OF DESTABILIZATION, TO A DEGREE NOW IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT. GEISEL'S AUGUST 1 SPEECH, HOWEVER, WAS CAST IN THE MOST PALATABLE POSSIBLE WAY: HE SPECIFICALLY GRATIFIED DISTENSION'S ADVANCES TO DATE: IN EMPHASIZING SOCIAL SERVICES HE ADOPTED A STANCE CLOSE TO THAT OF THE OPPOSITION AND BROADLY IMPERVIOUS TO ATTACKS AND IN REITERATING EARLIER CALLS FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT HE HELD OPEN, AT LEAST IN THEORY, THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER DEMOCRATIC ADVANCES. THE ASSIMILATION OF HIS MESSAGE WAS ALSO DOUBTLESS EASED BY GENERAL AWARENESS WITHIN THE POLITICAL CLASS OF THE HEAVY PRESSURES ON HIM, AND BY THE FACT THAT TODAY'S ACTIVE BRAZILIAN POLITICIANS ARE MORE OR LESS BY DEFINITION PREPARED TO PLAY THE GAME ACCORDING TO RULES THAT ARE EXTERNALLY IMPOSED AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE.

3. IN ANY CASE, THERE IS VIRTUALLY NO ALTERATION ON THE POLITICAL SURFACE: DESPITE SOME FEW INSTANCES OF RE-ENCROACHMENT BY THE CENSORS, THE PRESS CONTINUES TO GIVE LIVELY TREATMENT TO THE FULL RANGE OF ISSUES: AND THE PARTIES AND THEIR MEMBERS REMAIN ACTIVE IN THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL AND ELECTORAL CONCERNS.
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4. BOTH PARTIES, FOR EXAMPLE, RECENTLY RENEWED THE LEADERSHIPS OF THEIR STATE ORGANIZATIONS. IN GENERAL THIS PROCESS IS LESS DIFFICULT FOR THE MDB, WHICH DOES NOT SHARE TO A COMPARABLE DEGREE THE PROBLEMS ARENA HAS IN THE STATES IN DEALING WITH PERSONAL RIVALRIES AND FACTIONALISM REPRESENTED BY THE LEGACIES OF THE LEGALLY EXTINCT POLITICAL PARTIES. THE GREAT EXCEPTION OCCURRED IN NEW RIO DE JANEIRO

STATE, WHERE SENATOR AMARAL PEIXOTO, LEADER OF THE OLD STATE'S MDB, AND EX-GOVERNOR CHAGAS FREITAS, GUANABARA'S MDB BOSS, VIED FOR CONTROL OF THE PARTY. THE VOTE, PUNCTUATED BY FISTFIGHTS AND QUESTIONABLE BALLOTING PROCEDURES, WENT TO THE PEIXOTO FORCES, BUT IS UNDER FORMAL PROTEST.

5. ARENA'S GREATER DIFFICULTIES IN THIS PROCESS GAIN ADDED SIGNIFICANCE BECAUSE THE PARTY'S GREATER ORGANIZATONAL STRENGTH AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS ARE AN IMPORTANT ELECTORAL ADVANTAGE, AND IT CAN ILL AFFORD A SITUATION IN WHICH SOME PORTION OF THAT ORGANIZATION BECOMES DISGRUNTLED AND SITS ON ITS HANDS AT CAMPAIGN TIME. FOR ARENA NATION-WIDE, THE RECENT PROCESS ESSENTIALLY RESULTED IN NO CHANGE, ALTHOUGH AS IN THEPAST IT WAS POSSIBLE IN SOME CASES TO PAPER OVER DIFFERENCES WITH A COMPROMISE. IN SUM, ARENA'S CONDITION IN THE VARIOUS STATES CONTINUES TO RANGE FROM FAIRLY COHESIVE TO DEEPLY DIVIDED, AND OVERALL TO REFLECT THE PESSIMISM AND MALAISE GENERALLY AFFLICTING THE PARTY.

6. BOTH PARTIES ARE NOW PREPARING FOR THE NATIONAL CONVENTIONS, AND HERE TOO THEY FACE DIFFERENT SITUATIONS. FOR ARENA, THE PROBLEM IS BASICALLY THAT OF RECONCILING THE VARYING CLAIMS AND REQUIREMENTS OF LOCAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL PARTY LEADERS, AND OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND THE PRROCEDURES ARE ALMOST ENTIRELY OF THE SMOKE-FILLED-ROOM VARIETY. IN THE MDB, THE STRUGGLE IS CONDUCTED MORE OPENLY, BUT THE EFFORT HAS ALSO BEEN ONE OF ATTEMPTING TO ACCOMMODATE THE PARTY'S HETEROGENEOUS ELEMENTS IN FINDING A SINGLE, AGREED LEADESHIP SLATE WHICH WILL COMMAND A SUBSTANTIAL MAJORITY AND AVOID A DIVISIVE FIGHT. A COMPROMISE WAS REACHED ACCORDING TO WHCH THE PARTY'S CURRENT LEADERSHIP, BASICALLY MODERATE, AGREED TO SOME (LOWER LEVEL) OF THE JOB DEMANDS OF THE SO-CALLED "RENOVATORS," BASICALLY THE MORE RADICAL AUTENTICO WING PLUS THE "NEO-AUTENTICO"GROUP, CONFIDENTIAL

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ESSENTIALLY HUNGRY FIRST-TERMERS. NOW, HOWEVER, A SPLIT HAS DEVELOPED OVER THE CALLED-FOR INCLUSION OF FRANCISCO PINTO, THE RADICAL FORMER DEPUTY CASSATED AND JAILED FOR OFFENDING CHILEAN PRESIDENT PINOCHET. ARENA HAS ALSO SEEN A PROBLEM DEVELOP OVER THE INCLUSION OF TWO ARCH-RIVALS FROM MARANHAO.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BRASILIA 7803

7. ON A BROADER PLANE, ARENA SENATOR LUIZ VIANNA FILHO, JUST AFTER BEING PASSED OVER FOR THE PARTY PRESIDENCY, RELEASED A LETTER CONTINING SUGGESTIONS FMR THE PARTY AS IT FACES ITS UNCERTAIN FUTURE. WHILE MOST OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS WERE UNEXTRAORDINARY (SKILLED LEADERSHIP, BROADENED APPEAL THROUGH SUPPORT OF SUCH MEASURES AS TAX REFORM), HE ALSO SAID ARENA SHOULD DISSOCIATE ITSELF FROM THE GOVENMENT IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO CALL FOR CHANGES AND THUS OBTAIN MORE POPULAR BACKING.

IM IN A SIMILAR VEIN, JOAQUIN COUTINHO, A LITTLE-KNOWN ARENA DEPUTY FROM PERNAMBUCO, STARTLED THE POLITICAL WORLD WHEN HE UNEXPECTEDLY DECLARED THAT ARENA SHOULD "STOP CLAPPING AND SAYING AMEN", ADDING THAT HE WOULD NOT ALWAYS CLAP AND WAS IN THE CONGRESS TO OBEY HIS CONSCIENCE. HE SUBSSQUENTLY APPEARED TAKEN ABACK BY THE STIR HIS REMARKS CAUSED, AND THE ISSUE WHICH THEY RAISED-- ON THEIR FACE THEY RUN SQUARELY ATHWART THE PARTY FIDELITY LAW--HAS NOT YET BEEC JOINED.

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9. THE REMARKS OF BOTH MEN BEAR DIRECTLY, OF COURSE, ON WHAT HAS REMAINED THE CENTRAL POLITICAL CONCERN: ARENA'S DIM ELSCITORAL PROSPECTS AND THE GRAVE QUESTION MARK THEY PLACE

OVER BARZIL'S POLITICAL FUTURE. TOPICS SURROUNDING THAT CONCERN--
POSSIBLE PARTY REFORMULATION OR PROLIFERATION, POSSIBLE CHANGES
IN THE SCHEDULING OF, OR RULES GOVERNING, FUTURE ELECTIONS--
ARE, AS BEFORE THE GEISEL SPEECH, THE DAILY BREAD OF POLITICS
AT THE MOMENT.

10. THE PREVIOUS CONSENSUS--THAT NO FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES ARE
TO BE EXPECTED BEFORE THE 1976 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS--CONTINUES
TO PREVAIL, REPRESENTING A KIND OF BAD-NEWS-GOOD-NEWS SPLIT.
THAT IS, THOSE HOPING FOR FURTHER ADVANCES IN DISTENSION RECOGNIZE
THAT NONE CAN BE ANTICIPATED UNTIL THEN. THE GOOD NEWS-- SUCH AS
IT IS--WOULD BE THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO LET THOSE
ELECTIONS BE CARRIED OUT WITH NO CHANGES IN THE RULES OF
THE GAME. IN FACT, A MINOR FLAP WAS SET OFF WHEN CHAMBER
MAJORITY LEADER JOSE BONIFACIO TOLD A JORNAL DO BRAZIL REPORTER
THAT THE PARTIES "WILL NOT BE EXTINGUISHED", THE GOVERNMENT WILL
ADHERE TO THE ELECTORAL CALENDAR, AND MDB VICTORIES IN THE
1978 CONGRESSIONAL AND GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE
RESPECTED. INFORMED THAT MDB PRESIDENT ULYSSES GUIMARAES FOUND
HIS REMARKS ENCOURAGING, BONIFACIO REPORTEDLY EXPRESSED ALARM,
SENT FOR A COPY OF THE JORNAL STORY, AND CLARIFIED THAT HE HAD
BASED HIS STATEMENTS ON THE LAWS CURRENTLY IN FORCE.

1. THE POINT, OF COURSE, IS NOT BONIFACIO'S WELL-ESTABLISHED
CAPACITY FOR ILL-CONSIDERED REMARKS, BUT THAT GUIMARAES, DOUBTLESS
AWARE OF THAT CAPACITY AND SPEAKING FOR EFFECT, SHOULD DECLARE
THE REMARKS ENCOURAGING. IN FACT, WHILE THE CURRENT GENERAL
ESTIMATE IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED, AS ONE COMMENTATOR
PUT IT, TO "RUN THE CALCULATED RISK" OF HOLDING THE 1976 ELECTIONS
AS PLANNED, THERE IS ALSO A WIDESPREAD ASSUMPTION THAT IF THE
RESULTS OF THOSE ELECTIONS APPEAR TO SPELL TROUBLE FOR ARENA--
THAT IS, FOR THE GOVERNMENT-- IN 1978, THEN STEPS WILL BE TAKEN--
PARTY REFORMULATION, CHANGE IN ELECTORAL LAWS, OR WHATEVER--TO
ENSURE THAT SO MUCH TROUBLE DEVELOPS.
CRIMMINS

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